

THE TIME CAME.

"Oh, if Dick would only do something," sighed Millicent very softly to herself. "I do believe if it were nothing more than getting run over by a car, it would hurt very much, that papa would be so pleased he would let me marry each other after all. But Dick won't. I'm afraid he'll never do anything. He never has." And then she looked over at Dick, who sat very meekly on the other side of the room twirling his gloves listlessly, and she pouted.

"I suppose you are pouting at me," said Dick.

"Yes," she answered.

"I'm sorry," he continued. "I suppose it's because I don't amount to anything."

"Of course it is, Dick," she answered. "Well, what in the world can I amount to?" asked Dick dejectedly. "I cannot go and make a fortune, for I'm not rich already. I can't find a great family, because ours has been as good as one for centuries as a fellow can wish, and besides that would take too long. I haven't the talent to be an artist. I haven't brains enough to be a professional man. Every one agrees on that. I am too small to be a soldier, and if I went into business it would only be a question of time before I'd lose my money instead of making any. They all agree on that too. All I can be is a gentleman, and no one seems to care anything about a gentleman any more. I believe your father would like me better if I were an adventurer."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't," interrupted Millicent. "But the colonel would like to see you once in a while without such awfully good clothes on. Papa has had a hard struggle in this world, and he doesn't seem to have any confidence in any one who has not. He is always talking about the duty a man owes to the world to do something for it."

"I would be willing to do anything for the world I could, Millicent, but I don't know what to do, and don't believe I could do it if I did know."

"I believe if you had got angry and called him names when he refused to let me marry you he would have turned right around and said yes. But all you did was to pick up your hat and gloves, bow very politely, and say good evening and walk out. That's no way to handle papa; he needs an iron hand, and he gets it occasionally from his only daughter too." Here Millicent shook her head emphatically.

"But I respect your father too much, Milly, to say anything mean to him, and if I had, then he wouldn't have let me come to see you any more, and that would have been more than I could have stood."

"You're not like other men, Dick?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I suppose that's why they call me a dude. But I'm not a dude; I'm not silly. I can't get my clothes soiled, no matter how I try, and as I never seem to wear them out, I haven't got any that look like old ones. The fact is I can't help looking what I am—a boy who has been brought up in a kid glove. If I wore blue jeans and a flannel shirt they'd always look new."

"Why couldn't you go out in a fight with some one?" suggested Millicent desperately.

"I'm afraid no one would fight with me, I'm so small," he answered.

"Papa was really delighted with the butcher's boy and the grocery boy the other day when they got into a fight in our back yard. It frightened me, but the colonel went out and gave them each a dollar, and laughed all the rest of the afternoon about it."

"I might get the boxing master at the club to give me a black eye. I don't suppose it would hurt very much. But if I did the colonel would find out that I didn't get it in a fight, and he would think that I had been trying to deceive him."

"Dick," said Millicent seriously, "I wonder if you are afraid?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Afraid of the dark, or of danger, or anything like that—for instance, I'm afraid of the dark."

"No," answered Dick. "I don't think I am afraid of the dark. I don't know about anything else, for I don't believe I ever had anything to be afraid of."

Millicent sighed again very softly to herself. It was rather a hard state of affairs. Here was the man she wanted to marry, just the kind of a man she with her imperious ways could get along with beautifully; a boy whom she had known all her life; whose father had been her father's friend; whose mother had been her mother's friend; and a man, too, whom she loved—and always had—since she was a little girl in short dresses and he a boy in knee trousers; and they could not get married because in the eyes of her father he didn't amount to anything. Would he ever amount to anything? What did she care? Was he brave and manly? What did she care? Was he brave and manly?

The question gave her an inspiration. It wouldn't be much of a trial, but it would at least be a little bit of fun, and all they had done in all their courtship was to sit on opposite sides of the parlor and talk to each other. She rose and went out into the hall. Dick eyed her as she went out, but he never questioned anything she did, so he said nothing. She walked back to the stairs leading to the basement and looked down. Everything was satisfactorily dark. The light in the lower hall had been turned out, and from this she knew that the servants had gone to bed. It was nearly midnight she noticed by the dining room clock. With a satisfied smile she walked on tiptoe and with a great pretense of fright back to the parlor.

"Dick," she said in a whisper that seemed quite terrified. "I heard some one down stairs and I'm afraid it's a burglar. Would you just as he go and look?"

"With pleasure," he said, in that calmly polite way he never forgot.

She smiled as she noticed that he carried his gloves in his hand as he would on the street, and felt unconsciously of his routine to see if it were adjusted correctly. Dick walked to the head of the back stairs while she remained in the parlor peering out half hidden by the doorway. He looked far over and listened intently.

"Do you hear anything?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes," he answered.

"What does it sound like?" she continued.

"Like a man snoring," he answered.

stood but a moment before, and she knew that the moment was as still as the grave. It was his frightened imagination, that was all. She would see the thing out. Perhaps Dick was afraid after all. She whispered again.

"Do you want a revolver?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "I wouldn't know what to do with it if I had one." Then she saw him disappear down the stairs.

She went back into the parlor and picked up his hat. She smiled as she noticed how new it looked, just like everything else he had. Then she tried it on and stood before the glass wondering if it wouldn't make a pretty riding hat. She remembered that if any other man were to come back into the parlor and find her with his hat on her head he would promptly demand a kiss, after the good old custom.

But Dick—no, Dick would never think of such a thing, or dare to do it if he did. Presently she wondered why he was gone so long. He wasn't afraid of the dark after all. He must have decided on a very thorough search. She wished her father would come down stairs and discover that Dick had done at least that much in the world. But no; she could hear her father walking up and down the room immediately above her, thinking of all sorts of things that he called important, but which did not interest her at all. She was just beginning to feel lonely and to wish that Dick would get through and come back when she heard a dull sound, as though something heavy had fallen in the kitchen. There was silence for a moment after that, and then she heard a great crashing of glass and she heard Dick call loudly for the police. Her heart leaped up into her throat. She wanted to call him to come back to her as he loved her, but she could not utter a word. She ran to the front window in her fear and threw it open.

A stockily built fellow who looked gigantic in the half light of the street lamp was just making his escape through the gate and down the street, while right underneath her, bareheaded, but still with his immaculate gloves in his hand, Dick ran after him, still calling at the top of his voice for a policeman. She saw them go, forty feet apart, down the street at the best speed they could make. She saw them disappear from the light of one street lamp and come out into the light of another twice, and then she saw the stockily built fellow wheel quickly around; she saw a little sharp line of flame; she heard a loud report; and then—she fainted.

It was but half an hour later that a cab drove up to the colonel's door, and Dick alighted—not the immaculately clad Dick that he usually was, but Dick with a bloody handkerchief tied around his head, and with much dirt on his trousers, and his necktie all awry, and with no gloves at all. He did not have to ring at the door, for it was opened ere he was half way up the front steps by the colonel himself, who came out with his great grizzled hand outstretched toward him.

"I came back to get my hat and overcoat," Dick began to apologize.

"No, you didn't," said the colonel, shaking his head heartily. "You came back to see Millicent. Did you get the fellow?"

"Yes, sir; a policeman caught him eventually, and he's in the station house now."

"We'll attend to him tomorrow," said the colonel. "In the meantime come in and see your sweetheart. She fainted, and I'll tell you right here that if you expect to wear a hat away from this house tonight it will have to be one of mine, for she has hugged that one of yours ever since the alarm was given, and it's rather out of shape."

Millicent, still very pale, was reclining in an easy chair when Dick entered, and a maid was rubbing her temples. She looked very much as though she wanted to cry. Undoubtedly she had been crying.

"Good evening, Milly," said Dick.

"Oh, Dick! did he hurt you?" she asked.

"He hit me over the head just as I discovered him. But don't worry; the doctor said it wouldn't amount to anything."

And then of course Millicent did cry, and Dick stood staring at her and looking very foolish and very much as though, as usual, he did not know what to do; and probably he would still be standing there if the colonel, in his grief voice, hadn't said to him:

"Go over and kiss her, my boy. Don't you see that's what she wants?"

"But I'm all blood and dirt," apologized Dick.

"Blood and dirt!" roared the colonel. "Blood and dirt! You ought to be proud of it. Why, you're the first member of your line who has had any blood and dirt on him since your great grandfather was wounded at Bunker Hill. Go and kiss her."

And Dick did, and it seemed to him that fortune had suddenly condescended to shower on him all her blessings when he heard the colonel saying as he went out of the room:

"I'll give you two just half an hour to decide when you are going to get married, and then you must say good night."

—T. W. Hall in Harper's Weekly.

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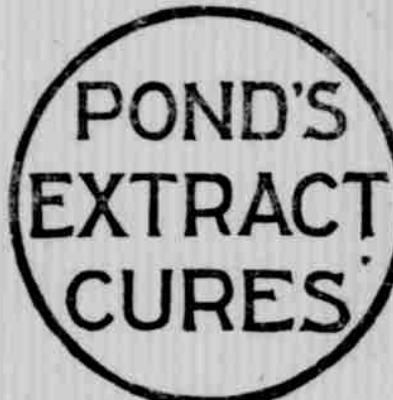


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